

*"Our World has enough for each person's need, but not for his greed."*  
Mahatma Gandhi (1869-1948)

## **Asia Pacific Regional Civil Society Statement <sup>1</sup>**

**Seoul**  
**2-3 November 2006**

### **1. Introduction**

The Asia Pacific region is home to more than half the world population – approximately 4 billion out of more than 6 billion. It has 3 of the world's most populous countries, 3 of the world's largest countries, 2 of the least populated, 13 least developed countries, 12 landlocked countries, one of which is among the 2 double landlocked countries in the world, and 17 small island developing countries. 70% of the population lives on less than a dollar a day. By 2025 the number of mega-cities (population over 10 million) in the Asia-Pacific will have risen to 20 from 16; more than half of the population will live in mega-cities. The enormous growing population is expected to use more resources to achieve economic growth. More often than not this economic development will occur at a cost to the environment. The region has 5 distinct sub-regions: Central Asia, South Asia, Southeast Asia, Northeast Asia and the South Pacific.

### **2. Asia Pacific Civil Society perspectives**

The civil society meeting was briefed on UNEP's regional strategic approaches, including the challenges and opportunities:

- Promoting regional and sub-regional cooperation;
- Strengthening environmental communities;
- Addressing emerging environmental issues;
- Leadership through demonstration.

Suggestions from the civil society group included the following:

- A call for a more coordinated approach across the five sub-regions, with special attention to the role of the Sub-regional Environmental Policy Dialogue (SEPD) and the Ministerial process;
- Focus on the processes, such as the Bali Strategic Plan on Technology Support and Capacity Building;
- A needs-responsive approach by the international organisations to local, national and regional priorities and issues;
- Focus more on non-formal education, within the context of the UN Decade of Education for Sustainable Development;
- Promote service-oriented approaches, especially in the context of sub-regional organisations; and
- Enhance partnerships with civil society and building the "legitimacy" of regional civil society consultations by institutionalizing the process at the sub-regional levels.

The need to ensure environmental sustainability and eco-security is a prerequisite for poverty alleviation. The importance of mainstreaming the environment into all sectoral policies and addressing poverty across the board in all sectoral policies should be a priority for all governments.

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<sup>1</sup> UNEP facilitated the participation of 50 participants representing 8 major groups including representatives from various networks, advocacy groups, technical experts and grassroots NGOs, from all 5 sub-regions of the region namely: North East Asia, South East Asia, South Asia, Central Asia and the South Pacific, at the Regional Consultations Meeting of the 8<sup>th</sup> UNEP Global Civil Society in Seoul on 2-3 November 2006.

### **3. Recommendations to UNEP's 8<sup>th</sup> GCSF on five themes:**

#### **A. Chemicals Management**

##### **Background**

Chemicals including pesticides, industrial chemicals and consumer chemicals have become indispensable in many economic activities and are increasingly used in the industrial, agricultural and consumer sectors of all society. However, increasing evidence suggests that chemicals can contribute to environment and health problems at various stages during their life cycles from production, import through disposal.

It is now widely recognized that chemicals need to be managed properly in order to achieve a sustainable level of agricultural and industrial development and a high level of environmental and human protection.

The Strategic Approach to International Chemical Management (SAICM), as endorsed by the national governments in Dubai 2006 is a plan for achieving, by 2020, that all chemicals are used and produced in ways that lead to the minimization of significant adverse effects on human health and the environment.

##### **Key Challenges**

For the implementation of SAICM in Asia Pacific region the key challenges are lack of capacity, the need for financial support and technical assistance, non-existence of chemical specific legislation, lack of awareness, political barriers, poor compliance and low priority given to environment issue by national government.

##### **Recommendations to Government:**

While civil society and member organizations, including non-government organizations, have been supportive of the SAICM process, we urge Governments to address its many gaps and deficiencies, including those related to pharmaceuticals, food additives and radioactive chemicals.

- a) We urge all governments promptly to adopt and implement SAICM.
- b) Implementation of SAICM must include measures to phase out and acquire safer substitutes and solutions when a chemical causes significant adverse effect to human health or the environment under its ordinary conditions of production, storage, transportation, use or disposal in a country or region.
- c) Implementation of SAICM must embrace core principles and approaches, including the precautionary principle, liability and compensation, public participation, comprehensive right-to-know legislation, the polluter-pays principle, and others.
- d) Additionally, the principle of "no safety data, no market" according to the Rio Principle 10 should be adopted and implemented in all countries.
- e) The institutional arrangements for implementation of SAICM must be dynamic and fully participatory.
- f) The ratification and consolidated implementation by all countries of the Stockholm Convention, and of any amendments for additional persistent organic pollutants, and of other chemicals and wastes agreements including the Rotterdam Convention on the Prior Informed Consent Procedure for Certain Chemicals and Pesticides in International Trade; the Basel Convention on the Control of Trans-boundary Movements of Hazardous Wastes and Their Disposal, including its Ban Amendment; the 1996 Protocol to the Convention on the Prevention of Marine Pollution by Dumping of Wastes and Other Matter (London Convention); International Labour Organization Convention C170 Concerning Safety in the Use of Chemicals at Work; the Globally Harmonized System of Classification and Labelling of Chemicals, and relevant regional chemicals and wastes agreements.
- g) Governments are urged to take actions at the national and local levels to prohibit, except for bona fide public health and research purposes, the production and export of chemicals and technologies when the use of the same is banned within their own borders.
- h) 3Rs policies, emphasizing source recovery, employment generation and community ownership are to be adopted.
- i) There is a dire need for public awareness, communication, information exchange, and education at all levels and capacity building for the implementation of risk reduction measures on mercury, lead and cadmium.

- j) We urge governments to also take necessary measures for effective enforcement of Extended Producer Responsibility (EPR) in their countries.
- k) The capacity of the UNEP Chemicals Branch be strengthened to facilitate the implementation of chemicals-related multilateral agreements and initiatives and to assist Governments and civil society in global actions for the sound management of chemicals.
- l) The environmental and health effects of Mercury, Lead, Cadmium and other metals have been recognised worldwide. The risk from these metals needs to be addressed further by appropriate actions at local, national, regional and global levels.

#### **Recommendations to Civil society:**

The Civil Society recognizes that sound chemicals management through an effective Strategic Approach to International Chemicals Management (SAICM) is essential for the protection of the environment and the health of current and future generations and poverty alleviation.

The civil society appreciates the follow-ups to the Dubai declaration, the establishment of SAICM focal points for NGOs, governments and inter-governmental organizations of regional SAICM meetings and the Quick Start Program (QSP). These SAICM implementing activities should be fully supported and encouraged with enhanced provision of financial support.

- a) Civil society organizations support SAICM and the concept that it will lead to the adoption of a legally binding international instrument.
- b) The current experiences available within civil society and communities to address chemicals and chemical wastes problems be promoted and capacities be built for the same at the local, regional and global levels.
- c) The active participation of local communities in risk assessment and environmental impact assessment of upcoming chemicals manufacturing projects to be ensured.
- d) Civil Society remains committed to create awareness and educate the people on environmental and health impacts, especially on children, due to improper and excessive use of chemicals including Persistent Organic Pollutants and heavy metals (Mercury, Lead and Cadmium) and promoting occupational health and safety measures.

#### **Recommendations to UNEP:**

- a) New and additional funds for SAICM implementation to developing countries and countries with economies in transition be made available.
- b) Donor countries and donor agencies be encouraged to provide new and additional financial and technical assistance that enables developing countries and countries with transitional economies to implement fully all their commitments under international chemicals and wastes agreements and initiatives.

### **B. Water and the Environment**

#### **Background and challenges**

Water is a vital resource, which makes an indispensable contribution to social, economic, and environmental development. In a growing number of local, national, regional and international environmental and development conventions/conferences water has emerged as one of the key issues to address in securing environmental sustainability. Most of Asia's countries face significant water-related problems, which are on the increase. 55 million people are added to Asia's population each year and water consumption levels have risen from 60 litres to 400 litres per capita, in the last 50 years.

Both surface and groundwater pollution in different countries is becoming severe. The water quality of many of the region's rivers is below nationally agreed standards. These rivers are polluted by the discharging of untreated industrial waste (e.g. tannery, textile and dying, etc), dumping of municipal solid waste and disposal of significant amounts of untreated sewage.

Water scarcity is another problem for many countries of Asia and the Pacific posing a serious threat to agricultural production, fisheries and forestry, poultry and livestock production etc. Scarcity heightens water conflicts, which are emerging as an increasingly complex issue at local, national, regional and international

level. Allocations of water or sharing of water in an equitable and sustainable manner for multiple purposes such as agriculture, industry, navigation, fisheries and forestry, domestic supplies, hydro-power use are also not controlled properly.

Demand for safe water supply at urban level is on the rise in most of the cities of the region. Many cities like Dhaka mostly depend on ground water sources. The ground water level of Dhaka city is declining at about 1m/year, creating a severe threat to the people of Bangladesh and the other countries that are facing similar problems. Related to this are significant water sanitation issues including the disparity between rural and urban level sanitation services. Equally water governance, water rights, privatization and catchment management issues are all emerging as critical issues in most of the countries of Asia Pacific.

The construction of large dams has become an increasingly controversial issue due to potentially negative impacts on environment and local development and the trade-offs involved. It is clear that a more sensitive environmental approach needs to be adopted to ensure that rational decisions are taken regarding new dam construction.

According to the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC) and other relevant sources many of the countries of Asia and the Pacific will likely face adverse impacts from climate change and climate variability issues. Drought and salinity intrusion may also cause harmful impact on different development sectors (e.g. agriculture, infrastructure etc) of some countries of this region. A number of Asia's largest cities are threatened by rising sea levels which could have catastrophic impacts by 2100. This is of particular concern to many Small Island Developing States in the region. Exacerbated by climate change, the region is witnessing an increasingly broad range of water related natural hazards (e.g. floods, tidal surges, cyclones, etc) causing severe impact in different countries like Bangladesh, India, Thailand, Maldives, Sri Lanka, Philippines etc. These hazards cause damage on a massive scale to humanity, infrastructure, agriculture and other assets.

## **Best Practices**

Some selected examples from the region, but not exhaustive, that were raised at the meeting include:

(1) Cooperation between residents of upper and lower watersheds: Water conflicts often arise between the residents of upper and lower watersheds particularly when development limits have been imposed on the upper watershed in order to protect lower watershed water quality. The Korean government raises funds from a water quality-improvement fee collected from residents in the lower watershed. A large portion of the fund is used to help and compensate the residents and municipalities in the upper watershed, a practice that has helped ease water conflicts.

(2) Best practices for water supply policy

- Minimize the water loss in the water supply lines (e.g. leakage)
- Maintain the water lines in good condition
- Watershed council to deal with water pricing and other water-related policies

(3) Best practices for water demand policy

- Raise water pricing to save and conserve water resources
- Encourage water reuse and rainwater harvest for gardening and cleaning
- Provide education and maintain good public relations

## **Recommendations to Governments:**

### **Water Pollution**

- Work towards eliminating point source pollution from industrial agricultural and domestic waste sources through better laws, legal enforcement, policies, and an improved enabling environment;
- Raise awareness, provide incentives and find technological alternatives to address non-point source pollution; and
- Reward those demonstrating good practice in addressing water pollution and heavily penalize poor performance.

**Water Scarcity**

- Understand and manage for different water quality needs related to different uses, such as the water quality requirements for drinking water, agriculture, industry and ecosystem flows;
- Promote a better water conservation ethic and improved water conservation practices within communities; and
- Assess alternative water supply technologies in terms of environmental impact versus benefits. For example the benefits of desalination technologies are often outweighed by significant energy conservation impacts.

**Water Hazards**

- Establish early warning systems to alert and prepare communities for increasing frequency and intensity of disaster events;
- Build institutional capacity to adapt to a changing hazard environment;
- Improve monitoring to predict water-related hazard scenarios and adapt response strategies; and
- Improve water management to mitigate hazards; for example flood mitigation planning.

**Water conflicts**

- Encourage fair and equitable access and use of water across international boundaries;
- Advocate, promote and implement Integrated Water Resource Management (IWRM) concepts and principles;
- Establish national legislation to address issues related to water rights; and
- Investigate the establishment of international conflict resolution mechanisms.

**Climate Change**

- Develop and implement National Adaptation Programmes of Action (NAPA) in all countries of the region; and
- Invest in new renewable energy options including clean development mechanisms (CDM).

**Sanitation**

- Reinforce national commitment and action under MDG 7 especially in relation to ensuring wide access to clean water by 2015. In particular highlighting the disparity and inequality between rural and urban communities.

**Water Governance**

- Ensure public water rights and equity are maintained in the face of the growing trend toward privatizing water supply services and infrastructure;
- Promote and implement IWRM principles at all levels of water management including water demand and supply;
- Work towards improved and guaranteed water security for the people of Asia Pacific; and
- Promote and support intra-regional cooperation on water governance.

**Water Catchments**

- Ensure that full participatory environmental impact assessments are undertaken, and that decisions are taken in light of wider implications and in accordance with the recommendations of the World Commission on Dams Report (2000) on any large dam construction;
- Ensure that adequate areas of land are dedicated to essential water supply functions;
- Ensure that catchments and wetlands are effectively managed to deliver high quality water for example by ensuring healthy forest cover, good soil conservation practices, etc; and
- Establish more freshwater protected areas at national level as a foundation for maintaining essential water supply services.

**Recommendations to Civil Society:**

Civil society should play an influential and catalytic role in working with government and the private sector to:

- Build awareness of water-related issues and responses - specifically issues of water conservation and rain water harvesting;
- Share and provide relevant information to all stakeholders through effective networking across the region's civil society – applicable to all bodies;
- Promote national and sub-national activities on improved water management practice (IWRM);
- Promote positive policy change at all levels - international, regional, sub-regional, national and local;
- Advocate multi-sectoral and participatory approaches to addressing water-related challenges;
- Support region-wide and global water efforts; and
- Promote civil society as an equal partner in tackling all water related issues within the region.

#### **Recommendations to UNEP:**

- Work towards mounting effective regional and global campaigns to raise awareness; to educate community and decision-makers; and to raise capacities on water-related issues;
- Work to influence governments directly in their water management policies & practices
- Mobilize additional global funding for water and environment initiatives;
- Play a more active role in regional and sub-regional negotiations and initiatives; and
- To promote initiatives with respect to the Indigenous Peoples Kyoto Water Declaration, which was made at the 3rd World Water Forum Meeting in Kyoto, Japan, 18 March, 2003.

### **C. Gender and the Environment**

#### **Background**

The Beijing Platform for Action on women and the environment states *"Women have an essential role to play in the development of sustainable and ecologically-sound consumption and production patterns and approaches to natural resource management"*. The Millennium Declaration states that *"to promote gender equality and the empowerment of women as effective ways to combat poverty, hunger and disease and to stimulate development that is truly sustainable"*. Equal participation of men and women in environmental decision-making is a question of equal rights and responsibilities.

Over the recent years the international community gained a lot in the area of gender and environment: awareness was raised, experiences shared, studies commissioned, commitments made, policies defined, and organizational steps were taken. An increasing number of women in the Asia-Pacific region are now involved in environmental decision-making. NGOs and governmental environment agencies have women in middle-level management positions. The Bangladesh Government's interest in women's participation in environment was reflected in the Fifth Five-Year Plan 1997-2002. In Pakistan the National Plan of Action for implementing Beijing Commitments included a chapter on women and the environment. The Ministry of Gender Equality in the Republic of Korea and the National Assembly of Vietnam recommend a quota of 30% and 35% respectively be reserved for women in various kinds of advisory committees and agencies. The MDGs can be emphasized to make a strategic framework with full integration of the goals of the Beijing Platform for Action (Adopted at the Fourth World Conference on Women), which provides an important human rights-based approach to the development agenda for achieving gender equality and the empowerment of women, including indigenous women.

#### **Key Issues and Challenges:**

The Asia Pacific region still faces many challenges on the awareness, knowledge, capacity, resources and institutional changes to fully mainstream gender in environment organizations and programmes and that gender has not been institutionalized at organizational and country level.

- Lack of knowledge and vision on the relevance of gender in sustainable development and lack of awareness about the benefit of gender equality considerations in environment and sustainable development policies;

- Lack of a strong mandate to mainstream gender and shortage of gender-sensitivity in policies and programmes, e.g. reflected in the absence of gender analysis
- Predominantly male leadership of environmental institutions and organizations; as well as dominant power structures, paradigms and worldviews – and resistance to change;
- Unclear representation of women and their concerns in decision-making, and absence of strategies to ensure participation of women in formulation, planning, making decisions about and implementation of sustainable development;
- Under-representation of women and a gender perspective in environment research and training;
- Lack of gender-specific information and data and research on gender in sustainable development;
- Lack of women's access to and control over resources at local level, and lack of attention for local-global linkages;
- Women's organizations – natural allies in this process – sometimes lack an environmental focus or perspective; and
- To introduce the concept of eco-gender mainstreaming instead of gender mainstreaming.

#### **Recommendation to Governments:**

- Governments should make efforts and try to collaborate with and build mutual capacities with allies such as NGOs of local and national, International organizations, women's organizations on gender and environmental issues;
- Governments should encourage the network of Women Ministers of Environment and specialized UN sister organizations;
- Governments should establish departments for dealing with gender and environment;
- Governments should involve 'gender' in the process of achieving MDG 7, as much as involving environmental issues for realizing of MDG 3 and MDG 1;
- Governments should support to generate knowledge and organizing activities on gender and environmental issues;
- Governments should critically review educational systems including textbooks and try to revise them ecologically; and
- Gender and environment are close to all human livelihoods such as poverty, energy, global environmental change, health and conflict so government should give multi-support the research and several activities in Civil Society.

#### **Recommendation to Civil Society:**

- Civil Society should promote and organize environment-mentoring programmes to expand young women's leadership;
- Civil society should try to promote awareness on green consumerism such as green market and fair

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